

The Highways Aid Bill

"According to our Canadian Constitution the control of Highways belongs to the Province."

SIR WILFRID LAURIER,
House of Commons, April 21, 1913.

**The Borden Bill aimed at Federal control
to feed hungry Patronage Hunters,
to build, or promise to build,
ELECTION ROADS**

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THE NEED FOR GOOD ROADS.

During the first session of Parliament under the Borden Government, there was introduced a measure called the Highways Aid Bill. It is universally conceded that in many parts of Canada the roads are not what they might be, and that the efforts of the farmers, especially those who are pioneers in newly opened districts, are sadly hampered by the lack of good roads.

It is also well known that in many such places the means of the people are not sufficient to enable them to provide good roads; further, that while the Provincial legislatures have shown a commendable desire to procure improvement, they are embarrassed by inadequacy of revenues to be applied to the purpose.

CANADIAN CONSTITUTION MAKES CONTROL OF ROADS A PURELY PROVINCIAL BUSINESS.

Under the constitution of Canada, however, these roads come altogether under the jurisdiction of provincial authority, and a regard for the integrity of the arrangement under which the Provinces entered into Confederation must always deter the Parliament of the Dominion from seeking, under any pretence of good intention, from infringing upon the domain set aside for the exercise of Provincial authority.

The one safe rule of conduct, where the Dominion finds itself in position to contribute out of its resources for the benefit of the Provinces, is that which has been adopted in regard to the general Dominion subsidy, namely, to apportion the money pro rata to the population of the different Provinces, and then to leave to

the Provincial legislatures the disposition, under the recognized parliamentary safeguards, of the money so received.

For the Dominion, because it has the money to do so, to enter upon the field of action reserved for the Provinces, would necessarily tend towards the disruption of the very basis of Confederation.

At the time the bill was introduced there was a bye-election in the riding of South Renfrew, and platform supporters of the Borden Government, under the general leadership of Hon. Mr. Cochrane, indicated to the electors in the widely separated communities which compose that riding, the prospect of handsome expenditures on the highways at the hands of the Ottawa government. **As a matter of fact, sufficient promises were made by Tory heelers in this election to spend half of the total Good Roads vote for roads in Renfrew South, provided, of course, the Tory candidate was elected.** The Liberal candidate, Hon. Geo. P. Graham, was nevertheless elected.

THE BILL IN PARLIAMENT.

In the course of the debates on the bill, the Liberal parliamentary party took a firm stand against any invasion by the Dominion Government of the Provincial field. The Borden Government, however, insisted that while the money might be divided according to the population of the Provinces, **the expenditure of it must be left under its own absolute and exclusive control.**

WHAT THE SENATE DID.

The Senate, by the action of its Liberal majority, twice affirmed its willingness to pass the measure, commending the intention to devote considerable sums to the improvement of highways, but always upon condition that the expenditure of money upon objects recognized to be within the Provincial function and outside the Dominion function should be left to the initiative and responsibility of the Provincial legislatures.

The Senate's amendments in this sense were twice refused by the Borden Government and its majority support in the House of Commons, whose object and intention plainly was that the power and patronage incidental to the performance of this purely Provincial work should be kept in their own hands.

HOW TORIES STRANGLED THE HIGHWAYS BILL.

In introducing the first bill in 1912, Hon. Frank Cochrane said voluntarily that it provided "**that a certain amount of money should be granted to the different Provinces to build and improve highways.**"

Pressed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier for a more definite statement, Mr. Cochrane said "**the money will be divided the same as our subsidies for the different Provinces.**"

It was this provision—this and nothing more—that was put into the bill by the Senate in 1912 and again in 1913. **But, as this would be a stumbling block in the way of the Government using the money for vote getting instead of road building,** it was rejected, **every Tory in the House** voting to kill the Highways Bill rather than have the money expended legitimately by the Provinces.

The Government bills, as printed, **did not** contain this provision, and Mr. Cochrane even argued for Dominion control of the spending of the money.

Finally, the bona fides of the government professions was tested. On June 5, 1913, the day the Government for the second time refused the Senate amendment, Mr. Carvell, M.P., moved, the House being in Supply, that the sum of \$1,500,000 provided for in the defunct bill be made an ordinary subsidy to the various Provinces for construction or improvement of Highways, so that the money could be given to the Provinces that year.

The motion was wrongly ruled out of order by the Tory chairman and the challenge of Mr. Carvell against that unheard of ruling resulted in a Government majority vote of 42 to 21, killing the Liberal proposal to give the money to the Provinces.

Thus did the Tory majority refuse in the most direct and emphatic manner to allow this money to be voted for good roads in the various Provinces.

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